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World Chronicle

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GUEST: **JAVIER PEREZ DE CUELLAR**
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President, UN-UNESCO World Commission on Development and Culture

JOURNALISTS: Anthony Goodman, Reuters
Raghida Dergham, *Al-Hayat* (London)

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CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT

JAVIER PEREZ DE CUELLAR, former United Nations Secretary-General and President of the United Nations-UNESCO World Commission on Culture and Development, discusses a number of issues concerning the relationship between culture and development. On the political side, Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar reviews the successes and shortcomings of the world organization during his tenure as Secretary-General.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

Throughout the history of mankind, distinct cultures and civilizations have flourished, giving rise to today's cultural diversity. Where you live may determine who and what you are. Interactions of race, ethnicity, gender, language and belief lead to stronger bonds among the peoples of the world. But the unabated race for development has exacted a heavy price -- especially from third world cultures. Social structures and community life in many societies are increasingly fragmented. Culture has become more and more a consumer product. How can we strike a balance between development and preserving our cultures?

Our guest today needs no introduction. He is Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, former United Nations Secretary-General. Currently, Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar is President of the United Nations-UNESCO World Commission on Culture and Development.

Joining me to talk with Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar are Anthony Goodman of Reuters and Raghida Dergham of *Al-Hayat* of London. Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar, welcome to World Chronicle.

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: Thank you.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. former Secretary-General, tell us a bit about this Commission. During your Secretary-Generalship, development was a very important issue, culture perhaps not quite so much. Now we have a combination of the two. What does your Commission aim to do?

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: Well, I think the practical aim is to present, at the end of this year, both to the United Nations and to UNESCO, a report on what we consider important to say about the links between development and culture. As you know, it is a group of 13 persons: there are three representatives from Europe, three from Latin America, three from Asia, three from Africa, and then we have one -- we have 13 altogether, including the president. I am Latin American, of course, but I am not there because I am Latin American, it is because it was the choice of both the Secretary-General of the UN and the Director-General of UNESCO.

We have been working for the last almost two years to prepare a very important, substantive report which will contain conclusions and recommendations and, at the same time, a kind of built-in mechanism for implementation. And then, as you see, the task is not an easy one. But the fact that we come from different parts of the world -- Africans, Latin Americans, Asians, et cetera -- I think we can reflect in our report the views of our

different parts of the world, the different civilizations, the different cultures, the different languages. And I must say that it is a fascinating task. And we have chosen very important people, and I would like to say that we have five women among the 13.

LITTLEJOHNS: I noticed that one of your honourary members is Daw Aung San, the Burmese lady who's been under house arrest for a number of years.

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: It was for me a very important point to have her in our honourary membership. We have several Nobel Prize winners, and very distinguished people from the four continents. And I think so far we are working together in a very nice manner, I must say -- we are coordinating ourselves. And I am persuaded today, after this meeting in North America, that we are able to reach -- have more than a consensus, I would say unanimity, on the main points which we have to address.

But I would like to tell you, first of all, that our intention is -- how can I put it? -- to uproot from the minds of people that development is only an economic issue. We understand that it is a cultural issue as well. At the same time, I would like to uproot another thing, the idea that culture is just the arts, literature. The arts are everything in this world. And we are very proud, as I said before, to represent so many cultures, not in that sense, of arts and literature -- while I am extremely fond of both arts and literature -- but in this particular case we wanted to do something different, to address all problems related to development and culture. And they are problems so diverse, you know.... I would end this by saying how many problems there are: Of course the problem of gender is a problem which is very much in our mind; the problems of the preservation of different cultures, not only their respect, but as well the preservation of the different --

LITTLEJOHNS: As, for example, in your own country, Peru, you have the Inca culture.

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: In my own country, we have -- in Peru we have three main languages plus a number of small languages in the forest. And I am the first one who wanted to preserve the Quechua and the Aymara languages in my country. And I think it is a fascinating exercise. As I told you, right now we are working on the first draft of our recommendations. And with my ten years' experience as Secretary-General, and having been related to the United Nations for 19 years, I wanted to have something very concrete, I wanted to avoid, at least in the conclusions, something too vague, too difficult to implement. I think we must, and I must force my distinguished colleagues now to come down from their beautiful language to something, you know -- how do you call it? *terre-à-terre* we say in French -- to say, listen, let's speak in a language which everybody can understand.

LITTLEJOHNS: A language of the people. Yes, yes.

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: A language of the people, if possible. But a point which I wanted to stress, dear friends, is that we are not for a kind of uniformity, for a kind of a unity of culture, you know, so that everybody has to be either Anglo-Saxon or Latin. No, there is a combination, you know, a balance, which I think is our main objective.

GOODMAN: Although you said you didn't want to focus entirely on the economic element in development, since the 19th, and even since the 17th century development in the western tradition has been heavily science-based, and many cultures which may be rich in other fields might not be scientifically advanced. Does that mean among your recommendations will be a heavy injection of science into culture?

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: My dear friend, you know, technology is very much in our minds. There is a new word which has been coined, you know, this "cyber"--

LITTLEJOHNS: Cyberspace.

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: -- "cyberspace", and cyberspace is very much in our minds. Yesterday -- and now if I can be a little indiscreet -- we had in our meeting a young man, I don't know, not even 30 years old, but he was astonishing. His approach was really remarkable. And I'm referring specifically to cyberspace. And then of course another problem which is important for you is information. And on that, we have to be extremely careful not to be misunderstood and at the same time to open information to everybody. I don't know. I myself think something like an alternative information, or something like that, so that you can trust what you hear through the media. Because sometimes the media is -- well, I've known you for years, I know what your position is, but you know in some parts of the world the media is totally controlled by the government, and then people are mislead, you know, by the interests of the government. And that's something we have to study, how to deal with that particular problem without, at the same time, giving the impression that we want to control the press. On the contrary, the idea is to have total freedom of information.

DERGHAM: Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar, do you get into sort of a discussion on the clash of civilization, for example, Samuel Huntington's theory? Is this what you do in this sort of meeting? You spoke of concrete, you spoke of fascinating tasks that you are trying to accomplish, and you somehow still haven't brought it down to earth, at least in the way I understand you. What will you do? Is it a discussion --

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: Well, listen, we are trying to go around this problem, I think, in order to facilitate understanding. You know, I think perhaps it is because I have been at the UN for so many years that I always try to find common denominators, not the minimum but the maximum common denominator as far as it is possible. But this kind of

clash of -- you know, we have to be realistic, but at the same time I think we have to teach something to the world, without really imposing.

DERGHAM: And who do you want to teach it to? Is it governments? Is it societies?

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: Both, both. You are making a very good point. We don't intend to make -- even if both the United Nations and UNESCO are governmental organizations, we have to keep in mind the peoples of the world, to teach them how to defend themselves from their governments.

DERGHAM: Quite a task that is. How do you plan to do this?

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: Let's see, we still have several months, my dear friend. And I think that, due to the quality of my colleagues, we can reach something really important. A real message.

LITTLEJOHNS: What do you think of today's United Nations? Since you left more than three years ago, do you think the Organization is -- how shall I say it? -- is more important, less important? Is it making more of an impact, less of an impact? How do you assess it?

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: Well, my dear Michael, I think that, unfortunately, the United Nations is not what I think about it or what you think about it, it's what people feel about the United Nations.

LITTLEJOHNS: But you can have a detached view now.

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: Yes, yes, of course. I think -- well, I love the United Nations. As I told you before, I have been working with the United Nations and for the United Nations for almost 20 years. And I notice, as I travel a lot, that there is tremendous frustration. Because people see only the political aspect of what the United Nations does, and they don't pay enough attention to the enormous assistance effort which the United Nations does *vis-à-vis* African countries and even some other countries in the world, which is very valuable. I always say, you know, in my lectures and everything, see the United Nations as a system, not only as the organization of which I was Secretary-General. Think about the system. And I think the United Nations system should be much more coordinated. I think the ACC, unfortunately, is really --

LITTLEJOHNS: The what?

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: The ACC, you know what the ACC is. Yes, the coordination of the United Nations, which takes place twice per year, as you know. Which unfortunately is not efficient enough. I hope my successor -- as you know, the United Nations Secretary-General is just a *primus inter pares*, you know, he is not the leader of the

ACC. He has to coordinate it. But as I remember, my recollection is that when I was a chairman of the ACC --

LITTLEJOHNS: The Administrative Committee on Coordination.

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: On coordination, that's right.

LITTLEJOHNS: All the heads of agencies.

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: Exactly. -- I was always unable to get from my distinguished colleagues any agreement which was not on administrative things. And then to raise political, economic things was, unfortunately, totally useless, because they didn't pay much attention. But anyway, I think that is one point on which the United Nations has made tremendous progress.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is **World Chronicle**, our guest is Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, former United Nations Secretary-General and President of the United Nations-UNESCO World Commission on Culture and Development. Raghida?

DERGHAM: Yes. Have you been invited to the celebration, the 50th anniversary celebration of the United Nations? You served here for 10 years. Have you been invited?

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: Well, I think we have discussed it, I have discussed it with the present Secretary-General. And the conclusion of our discussion was that it was not indispensable that his two predecessors be present.

DERGHAM: Why? Why aren't you invited? There are only two predecessors, you and Kurt Waldheim. You served for 10 years, and so did Kurt Waldheim. Here's the 50th anniversary. Both of you will not be here. Is it because Mr. Waldheim is having a problem with the American authorities? And do you think this is enough justification that you, both former Secretaries-General, are not invited?

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: Well, I must say that my successor, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, asked me if I wanted very strongly to attend the 50th anniversary, and I told him, well, that is up to you. It is not something which for me is totally important in the sense that I don't think the United Nations celebration will be a failure if I am not present, and I leave it to him to decide.

DERGHAM: So you're not invited, right?

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: No, no, I am not. I was -- I must say that the Secretary-General asked me, you know, whether I made it a point to be present, and I told him that, as a former Secretary-General, what I wanted was to make things easy for my successor.

GOODMAN: If I might ask a very specific question, one often hears that the wars in the former Yugoslavia might have been avoided if the international community had done more to keep the Yugoslav Federation together and had not rushed in so quickly to recognize seceding states such as Slovenia and Croatia. Do you share this opinion?

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: Well, I am afraid that you have a short memory, my dear friend. I think it was in June or July when I was Secretary-General when I regretted that the European countries had rushed to recognize Slovenia and Croatia. I thought that it was really a wrong decision. And even after that, you know, I think the European countries were not strong, were not tough enough. You remember that I appointed a remarkable person to be my representative, Cyrus Vance. And the other side, we had Lord Carrington, another remarkable man. But even with all their enormous qualifications for the jobs, I feel, or I felt, that they had not enough support from both the European Community and the United States. And now, unfortunately, it is too late, and after three, or more than three years, four years, we see where we are, which is extremely, extremely disappointing. And I think in this particular case, one has to be honest. It is not the United Nations' failure, it is a failure of the countries which were in some way obliged, forced, to intervene in a really rude -- if I can use the expression -- manner in order to avoid a conflict.

LITTLEJOHNS: So you blame mainly the western European countries.

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: With your permission, I think the western European countries were not --

LITTLEJOHNS: Do you live in a western European country?

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: Well, as you know, I am from Spanish origin, and I feel totally identified with the western European situation, but it was their fault, it was their main responsibility. Because our American friends should have been a little more, let's say insistent with the Europeans to tell them, "Well, listen, that is your problem, the problem takes place in your part of the world, and what are you doing, in your role?"

DERGHAM: Where has the UN failed? It seems that on this particular issue you're saying it's not the UN's failure. Is there a time when, during your tenure, or right now, you feel the United Nations has failed?

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: Well, I think the United Nations has probably failed more than once. But we have to balance what was positive, as for instance the end of the war, the enmities, between Iran and Iraq. It was a long negotiation, eight years of fighting, and the result was very positive. And then Namibia was a positive result --

DERGHAM: So those are high points, Namibia, the Iran-Iraq negotiations; what else?

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: The Iran-Iraq negotiations, and Namibia, which, as I told you --

LITTLEJOHNS: The freeing of the hostages, perhaps?

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: Of course. But that was at the end. I was trying to be chronological.

LITTLEJOHNS: Oh, I see, yes.

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: And then the withdrawal of the Cuban forces from Angola was not such an easy thing. And, what else? Well, some things which were resolved during the Secretary-Generalship of Mr. Boutros-Ghali, such as Cambodia, for instance, but with which I worked for 10 years. And then the Middle East: As you know, we have never been very fortunate in having a role which we were actually prepared to play -- the United Nations. And finally, some frustrations which were not our fault, for instance, in the Falkland Islands crisis, the unfortunate decisions of the military government in Argentina didn't help. And in another case, in Iran-Iraq, unfortunately, as you know, I made every effort --

DERGHAM: You mean the Gulf war, you mean the coalition --

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: I'm sorry, Iraq-Kuwait.

LITTLEJOHNS: Yes.

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: In which I was, unfortunately, not very persuasive. But still, you know, the result was something which, as you remember I said, it was not a United Nations' war, it was a war approved and authorized by the United Nations. And, you know, we diplomats have ways and means, you know, of saying things. [LAUGHTER]

DERGHAM: But you haven't told me when.... My question was, was there something you regret, where you think you failed, as the United Nations, during your tenure?

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: Well, you know what my great failure is? Being unable to put together, at the same table, the North and the South. That is something which for me is extremely painful. To be as we are here now, you know, around the table as friends, discussing, exchanging views. I think that is a failure, my failure, and I am afraid that will be a failure of my successor as well as a failure of my predecessor. Because the political will is not there.

GOODMAN: With so many countries falling apart, and I give the examples of course of Afghanistan, Liberia -- you could perhaps name up to half a dozen others -- do you believe that perhaps some revival of a UN trusteeship system might be helpful in those cases?

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: I say very honestly that I never liked the Trusteeship Council. I think it was perhaps because I come from a country which was a colony. I didn't like the idea of a Trusteeship Council. But I don't think that we would go as far as

that, you know, to review, to inject new life into the Trusteeship Council. I don't know what is happening now in the Trusteeship Council. I think it is --

LITTLEJOHNS: It's practically folded up.

GOODMAN: It's finished. It's out of business.

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: There was an idea to replace it with something else. Was it human rights, or something like this? Do you remember? It must have been -- yes.

GOODMAN: Since Palau I think it's ....

DERGHAM: Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar, there is a problem that you mentioned a little earlier. It's the perception of the people of what the United Nations is all about. There is a sort of perception that there has been a decline in the moral authority or the moral reference of the United Nations. Part of it relates to Tony's earlier question on what happened in the former Yugoslavia, and others have a whole list of points they can make as to the decline in the moral authority and moral interest. Do you feel this is justified?

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: Well, actually, I think there is a disenchantment -- is that English?

LITTLEJOHNS: Disenchantment, yes.

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: Disenchantment. But you know, the problem we have always had at the UN is that we are held responsible for the lack of political will of member countries. People forget that the United Nations is an organization of Governments, it is not a super-power or a super-state. Of course, there are some shortcomings, and there are some mistakes. But the main responsibility rests with the Governments. If the Security Council was much more active and much more, let's say, diligent, as it was in the Gulf war, perhaps some problems could be solved. But, you know, it is so easy to put them to the.... You know, I remember when I entered the United Nations, even as Ambassador to the United Nations. And now, the atmosphere now, I think.... I don't know how the member countries and members of the Security Council don't take advantage of this atmosphere.

LITTLEJOHNS: Security Council members are meeting all the time, Mr. Secretary-General, but they don't seem to get anywhere.

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: Yes, but, you know, the problem is that I don't see the solutions, you know.

GOODMAN: Perhaps we should amend the Charter to say "We, the governments" instead of "We, the peoples". That would perhaps give a more realistic tone....

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: That's something which I thought from the very beginning. "We, the peoples", it is really -- they are taking our name, "We, the peoples", because now we have people that have no government.

LITTLEJOHNS: We have only a few seconds left. Do you think the office of Secretary-General should have more power?

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: I think so. I think perhaps a little more power is needed. You know, I am sure that -- you are an old United Nations hand, you know very well that every Secretary-General tries to get a little more power. It's always very modest. Starting even with Trygve Lie. Lie was the first one to start trying to get more and more power.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**.

Our guest has been Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, former United Nations Secretary-General, and President of the United Nations-UNESCO World Commission on Culture and Development. He was interviewed by Anthony Goodman of Reuters and Raghida of *Al-Hayat* of London. I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

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